

NOVEMBER 1998

HERMES

WESLEYAN'S MAGAZINE OF POLITICAL, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE THOUGHT



INSIDE:

**Nuclear Power, AIDS Proliferation,
Marijuana Decriminalization,
Selling Out, and much, much more!**

Join FOFFODKE's *Fast for Vice*

It's all well and good to talk about the social ills over there in California. But, quite frankly, there are very real injustices happening on campus, right before our very own eyes. You know what we're talking about — the eviction of the gentle brethren at our beloved Delta Kappa Epsilon (fondly pronounced DEEK). This very minute, those fat-cats down at City Hall are cackling in joy as they demolish the last stronghold of human decency in Middlesex County.

Those ghouls have been working for years to discredit the local chapter of this noble society. "DKE has a rape wall" they said. "DKE brothers harass foreign students" they claimed. "DKE is an institution of white male entitlement" they cried. And now they're saying that this proud organization isn't fit to manage its own living space! Do they honestly expect us to believe that just because a house is full of flammable garbage, has bathrooms that haven't been cleaned for months, and supports an ever-growing population of giant vermin, that our upstanding brothers aren't fit to have a home?

They say "you can't fight city hall," but they're wrong. Dead wrong. We cannot stand by and allow Big Government to throw our friends and neighbors out onto the cold and unforgiving streets of Middletown.

So please, join the Fast for Vice. No food for one

day—just three kegs of Natty Ice. Sign up outside MoCon and the Campus Center all this week.

—*The Fraternal Order of the Friends of the Fraternal Order of Delta Kappa Epsilon.*

Why Hermes?

Hermes was founded in 1975 by a group of student activists upset with Wesleyan's school newspaper, the *Argus*. *Hermes* is named after the god who, according to Greek mythology, slew the hundred-eyed monster, *Argus*. Nowadays we see ourselves more as a supplement than an alternative to the *Argus*, providing a more political, critical, and analytical outlet for Wesleyan students to express their opinions.

About seven issues of *Hermes* are produced a year. We publish a wide range of material, including articles on campus life, photo essays, short fiction, and opinion pieces, but we tend to focus on activism and social commentary from a variety of viewpoints. *Hermes* serves as an open forum in which students can publish their ideas, stimulate activism and awareness on campus, and maybe even make someone laugh in the process. We are always open to controversy or criticism, and we just love articles which report the dirty deeds of the Wesleyan administration, a form of activism in its own right.

The staff of *Hermes* meets once a week, usually on Sundays at 4pm in the WSA building (190 High St.). We are organized as a nonhierarchical collective, and work in an informal manner. *Hermes* has no permanent positions and nobody is in charge; decisions are made by the entire staff. Newcomers are welcome to show up and get involved at any time. In addition to staff writers, we need people willing to do proof-reading, editing, photography, and layout. We are presently using Adobe Photoshop and Quark Xpress for the Macintosh; if you are familiar with either (or would like to learn really quick), there is always work to be done. *Hermes* is what you make of it; the quality of output relies entirely on student input. With that in mind, we hope to hear from you in the not-so-distant future.



HERMES

DECRIMINALIZES..."

Prostitution

Gambling

Moral Turpitude

Sodomy

More Sodomy

Necrosodomy

Roadkill (eating of)

People (eating of)

Marijuana

Crack

Excedrine

Political Assassination

Passing On the Right

Indecent Exposure

NEA Grants

Loitering

Dan Young

Olivia deBree

Ben Oppenheim

The Ghost of Aongus Burke

Jessica Fantz

Tyler Cabot

Adam Hurter

Sara Donnelly

Hannah Nielsen-Jones

Jeff Schwaber

Laura Clawson

Karen Weingarten

Daniele Anastasion

Brian Edwards-Tiekert

Noah Lansner

Bob the Cat

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Check out Hermes On-Line at:
<http://www.wesleyan.edu/hermes>

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(With apologies to *Harper's Magazine*)

1. Number of people presently incarcerated in the United States: Over 1 million
2. The U.S. rank in percentage of population behind bars: 2 (Russia is first)
3. Number of people in jail per 100,000 of the U.S. population: 600
4. In 1980, percent of people in federal prisons on drug offenses: 25%
5. In 1998: over 60%
6. 1998 percent of people in federal prison for violent crimes: 13%
7. In 1980, percent of federal prison population who were minorities: about 33%
8. In 1998: about 64%
9. Number of times more than the average an African-American male is to likely be incarcerated: 7
10. Average sentence for drug offense in 1985, before mandatory minimum sentences: 23.1 months
11. In 1995: 70 months
12. 1997 percent of drug cases in which mandatory minimums were applied: 65%
13. Increase, between 1986 and 1996, in number of women in federal prison for drug offenses: 42%
14. 1997 budget of the Federal Bureau of Prisons: \$3.19 billion
15. Percent increase this is over the 1986 budget, before mandatory minimums: 1,400%
16. Number of human beings who could be fed by grain and soybeans consumed by U.S. livestock: 1.3 billion
17. Percent of corn grown in U.S. eaten by human beings: 20%
18. Percent of corn grown in U.S. eaten by livestock: 80%
19. Percent of carbohydrate wasted by cycling grain through livestock: 99%
20. Percentage of U.S. agricultural land used to grow beef: 56%
21. Pound of potatoes that can be grown on one acre of land: 20,000
22. Pounds of beef that can be produced on one acre of land: 156
23. Number of children who starve to death every day: 40,000
24. Number of people who will starve to death this year: 60 million
25. Pesticide residues in the U.S. diet supplied by meat: 55%
26. Pesticide residues in the U.S. diet supplied jointly by vegetables, fruits, and grains: 11%
27. Percent of male college students sterile in 1950: 5%
28. Percent of male college students sterile in 1975: 25%
29. Percent decrease in the sperm count of the average American male compared to 30 years ago: 30%
30. Wingspan, in inches, of average leghorn chicken: 26
31. Space, in inches, average leghorn chicken is given in egg factories: 6

Sources: 1-4: Bureau of Justice; 5-6: NORML; 7-8: Human Rights Watch;
9: www.druglibrary.org; 10-15: FAMM (Families Against Mandatory Minimums); 16-21: Diet
for a New American by John Robbins

YOU ARE THE MAN

A Response To Hermes' Sell Out Alumnus

by Noah K. Lansner

"When I graduate, I'll just go to work for Goldman Sachs for five years, make lots of money, and then go become a teacher. Is that okay?" This is the question a friend of mine offered up, and very similar to the one posed by Aongus Burke and Dave Freccia in recent issues of *Hermes*. This friend of mine wants very much to be a teacher, or a social worker, but he is too used to a certain lifestyle that he grew up with, and he just naturally assumes that he will have that same lifestyle. And to have that lifestyle, he's willing to give up what he really wants to do and work for a place he doesn't want to work for. But after all, it's only for a few years until he makes some money, pays off his loans, and saves up enough to live comfortably while he is a teacher.

Dave Freccia ("Who's the Man?" *Hermes*, December, 1997) pushes the standard argument for working for financial institutions, saying that he is "looking forward to working hard, earning money, and maybe even using part of it to do good things for the community. (Earning money and greed are two very different things.)" Yes, earning money and greed are different things. Greed is earning lots and lots of money, which is what Dave will be doing by going into consulting. But isn't it wonderful that he will give 5 of 10 percent of the money he is making to do "good things for the community?" I'm sure that he will have no trouble sleeping at night knowing what a terrific person he is. Unfortunately, the way he came about that money was by going to work every day and consulting with corporations on downsizing, outsourcing, and other activities that eliminate jobs, or strip them of hours and benefits. Then again, I guess it's all okay, because after costing those people jobs that pay real wages, Dave funnels a few hundred (or even a few thousand) dollars of his bloated salary back to the people he has screwed over.

Or maybe he could work in such a far-removed field as a law firm that represents Merrill Lynch. He's not hurting anyone there, right? As Mr. Burke ("Skeleton in the Closet," *Hermes*, October, 1998) noted, the people at his firm "don't spend their time talking about new and interesting ways to extract more surplus labor from the proletariat." The people at his firm just help those who do "extract more surplus labor from the proletariat," by making sure that their money-making efforts are in compliance with the law.

The problem with all three of these jobs is that they

don't just give tacit approval to a system that treats a lot of people like shit—they are directly involved in helping the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. And if you think that you can do the first without doing the second, you're wrong. Corporations increase their profits by moving their plants to countries where there is no minimum wage, or to other U.S. locations where they can avoid union contracts. When Mr. Freccia says that the advice he will give as a consultant will be "constructive, profitable, and (most importantly) wanted by its recipients," one wonders if he has really thought about what kind of advice that will be, and what its impact will be on actual people. Using part of the money you earn to help the community isn't good enough if that money was made by hurting the community.

The last line of defense I hear from these people is one that both Mr. Freccia and Mr. Burke used. It goes something along the lines of "you-can't-say-I'm-a-sell-

out-because-I-never-bought-in." Mr. Burke notes that he spent his time at Wesleyan fighting social injustice. Assuming that it is plain and simple to separate the two, it strikes me as

rather tenuous for Mr. Burke to fight against social injustices while working hard to preserve economic ones. I haven't been fortunate enough to rid myself of morals, but if I had, what's to stop me from hating him because he is queer? Or stopping him on the street and stealing his wallet because I don't like the way he looks, or because I want his money so my children can have a better life, and so I can have two cars and a big house like my parents did. If your answer is because one is legal and one is illegal, I worry about you a lot.

Not everyone who graduates from Wesleyan is going to go work for a non-profit group campaigning for social or economic justice. That's a fact of life. But that doesn't mean that we have to go work for the companies that preserve economic injustice; we certainly don't have to go work in capacities that help them do it. There are plenty of careers (and even temporary jobs) out there in which you can make a decent living without infringing on other people's right to make their own. You may have to have one car instead of two, cook food for yourself instead of eating out a lot, and forget about that skiing vacation in Vail. But it is possible to survive without those things. For those of you who are seniors now, think about that when Merrill Lynch comes to town.





AIDS:

The media's forgotten it.
The government stopped tracking it.
And it's worse now than ever...

by Aongus Burke

"Is AIDS Passe?" Megan Wolf asks in the October issue of *Hermes* as she bemoans Wesleyan's failure to offer much in the way of support to the AIDS ride when it recently passed through Middletown. Indeed, even leaders in the gay community, once a reliable wellspring of resistance against just about anyone anywhere who suggested that the AIDS crisis was receiving sufficient attention, now seem to be saying that the answer to Megan's question is a resounding yes. Bad-boy syndicated sex advice columnist Dan Savage, who showed in *Science Center 150* this past spring how much he likes to score himself a few laughs by mocking gay culture, has of late turned his guns on the remaining community voices that still dare to ask him for pledges for the AIDS ride

Protease inhibitors have been a blessing for those who can afford them and whose bodies can tolerate them.

and don't accept that new drugs mean that today represents "Life After AIDS," as the title of one piece he authored in early 1997 stated. Indeed Andrew Sullivan, certainly a strange bedfellow for someone like Savage (who at least seems to be frequently irked by straight people too), had already voiced a similar sentiment in declaring us all in the "Twilight of An Epidemic" in a November 1996 *New York Times Magazine* article, recently republished in his new book (I'm sure it helped him land a fat advance).

But after asking people like Savage and Sullivan their opinions on the matter, you might do well to look at the facts. Not that they're especially easy to find. The government has apparently believed that the AIDS crisis has been over for American gay men since the early 90s when the feds ceased funding most of the studies that tracked HIV transmission rates in this population. The remaining publicly and privately funded studies, with their varying designs and recruitment methods, make it hard to say for sure, but it's a safe bet that gay men in their twenties and thirties in American urban areas continue to seroconvert at a rate of no less than 2% per year—which, compounded over 20 years, would mean that at least 1/3 of gay men aged 20 today will become infected at some point in time.

Frightening though those numbers may sound,

they at least mean that a 20 year old gay man in 1998 has a substantially better chance of remaining uninfected in his lifetime than a 20 year old gay man in 1978. But the evidence also suggests that those improved prospects for American gay men have been distributed quite selectively. Safer sex educational materials that have largely been produced by white gay men and have inevitably failed to have much of an impact on other populations. There is precious little evidence to indicate that the rate of new infections for African-American gay men have dropped very much at all since the mid 1980s. It has been known for some time that young women of color make up the fastest growing group of people newly infected with HIV in the United States. In spite of all of this, only within the last month has the federal government declared HIV/AIDS in the African American population to be a public health emergency.

At least some new funds will now finally be coming the way of HIV prevention programs that target

African Americans. Programs that target injection drug users can only continue to hope. The evidence

But new studies indicate that the inhibitors do not work very well for very many for very long.

has been piling up for years that needle exchange programs are effective in slowing the transmission of HIV without increasing overall injection drug use. Indeed, the evidence has become so substantial that even the U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala has come out in support of needle exchange programs. But even though Shalala was his own appointee, and even though it is now believed that over half of new HIV infections in urban areas are the result of needle sharing, our gutless commander-in-chief won't support the creation of needle exchange programs. And no one seems to care.

Why not? Is it the new drugs? Protease inhibitors have been a blessing for those who can afford them and whose bodies can tolerate them. But new studies indicate that, even within this select population, the inhibitors do not work very well for very many for very long. Inhibitors generally fail quite quickly for those who've already suffered through single drug

therapies. Even HIV-positive men and women who never had the pleasure of subjecting themselves to anything like AZT frequently find that this new "cure" is almost as bad as the disease. Side effects ranging from grotesque fat deposits on random body parts to chronic diarrhea plague many of those who are on inhibitors. Most bets are off that the inhibitors will work any longer than five or so years for the average person. Scientists used to hope HIV could be eradicated from the body within that period of time if the new drugs were religiously taken on schedule; now the most optimistic of them thinks it will take no less than twenty years. Unless new drugs that relieve those on inhibitors from the heretofore required vigorous regimen of pill-popping become widely available, next to no one will exhibit the necessary discipline long enough to test that theory out. Even if such superhuman discipline existed in the Third World, where the spread of HIV is completely out of control, underdeveloped infrastructures and widespread poverty mean that access to the drugs is sporadic at best—the cost of a multiple-drug regimen starts at \$10,000 a year.

Unfortunately, HIV is by the far the most mutable virus ever encountered by humankind. Miss a few doses of protease inhibitors and within a day the HIV in your body can mutate into strains that the drugs can no longer incapacitate. Global inequality guaranteed that such mutations would occur in the Third World (where there's an unreliable black market for marginally cheaper AIDS drugs); human imperfection guaranteed it would happen in the First. And once those multi-drug resistant strains emerged, it was only a matter of time before their carriers started transmitting them to new populations. The reality of this "epidemiologist's nightmare," as Center for AIDS Prevention researcher Ron Stall has called it, has now been documented. It has surprised none of the experts. But another finding has emerged that, if confirmed, will herald what may be the real nightmare.

Though it is yet to be reported in the mainstream press, a reliable source informs me that a team of researchers has found that at least some of these superstrains of HIV not only overmatch protease inhibitors, but they also overpower the human body's defenses in a way that even previous strains of HIV have not. Traditional strains of HIV usually hit the body hard; as a result, viral load in fluids such as

The new multi-drug resistant strains of HIV may be scoring another victory over humanity.

blood and semen rises quickly in the first six months after infection. But soon the body responds by stepping up the destruction of infected cells that incubate new viruses and a year after infection, the viral load in bodily fluids normally drops dramatically. Before the inhibitors, it took on average around six years for the virus to begin to overwhelm the body again; once that happened, viral load would usually rise rapidly until death.

A person's viral load is directly proportional to their ability to infect others with HIV; the body's ability to fight off HIV for so many years after its initial attack was one of the major factors keeping the transmission of the virus somewhat at bay. But the new multi-drug resistant strains of HIV that are emerging may be scoring another victory over the human body and the human race. If the aforementioned

researchers are correct, at least some of the new superstrains are not being met with sufficient bodily response to bring viral load levels down shortly after infection. If that's the case, then the ability of those carrying these strains to infect new people will be perhaps several times greater than those infected with traditional strains. And God help those they do infect, because there will be no drugs to

Those carrying the new strains may infect other people at a greater rate than those carrying traditional strains.

treat them.

Contrary to what people like Savage and Sullivan would like to believe, drugs do not end plagues. A history of modern medicine will show anyone that public health initiatives do far more to end disease than medical advances. In the context of AIDS, many of the most urgently needed public health initiatives have been long in the proposal stage: Clean needles provided free of charge for injection drug users. Prevention programs designed by members of racial and ethnic minorities for the members of their respective communities. Safer sex educational materials that explicitly acknowledge the full variety of safer sex practices rather than presenting HIV prevention as a choice between condoms and abstinence. Easier, cheaper and more regular access to the new treatments for impoverished people everywhere.

We must press our politicians for real solutions to this public health crisis, not the counterproductive scapegoating measures like partner notification and names reporting that have been gaining so much political credence of late. AIDS may no longer be in vogue, but it is as dangerous as ever. Maybe even more so.

And God help those they do infect, because there will be no drugs to treat them.



Marxism—Still Valid After All These Years

By John Zorabedian

I am writing to refute a few of the points made in an article entitled "Marxism: Opiate of the Crackpots," which appeared in the last edition of *Hermes*. I do not claim to be an authority on Marxist doctrines, nor do I know much about the Spartacists or their beliefs. However, having read the Communist Manifesto and studied Russian and Soviet history, I believe that I sufficiently understand the issues at hand in order to offer my own perspectives on Marxism.

I would like to clear up what I see as a few misunderstandings in Mr. Young's article. It is true that, as Young states, "Marx's ideas were incomplete in their own time and are now totally out of date in 1990s America." However, they are not as out of date as he suggests. Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto in mid-19th century in London, and based his thesis on his interpretation of the workers' state in advanced capitalist countries such as Britain, where he studied, and Germany, where he was born. The Manifesto did urge workers to liberate themselves, but it was, for the most part, a theoretical essay. Marx certainly did not anticipate the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, long after his death, nor did he intend for his theories to be applied in a backward, peasant nation such as Tsarist Russia was at the turn of the century.

Marx's notions were quite perceptive and accurately described the conditions of his time. His historical perspective is no less accurate today. Marxism describes history as an evolutionary process. In this view, the feudal system and the existence of serfs would eventually give way to capitalism. Marx describes how the capitalists eventually would gain control from the aristocracy with their own liberal revolutions, such as happened all throughout Europe in

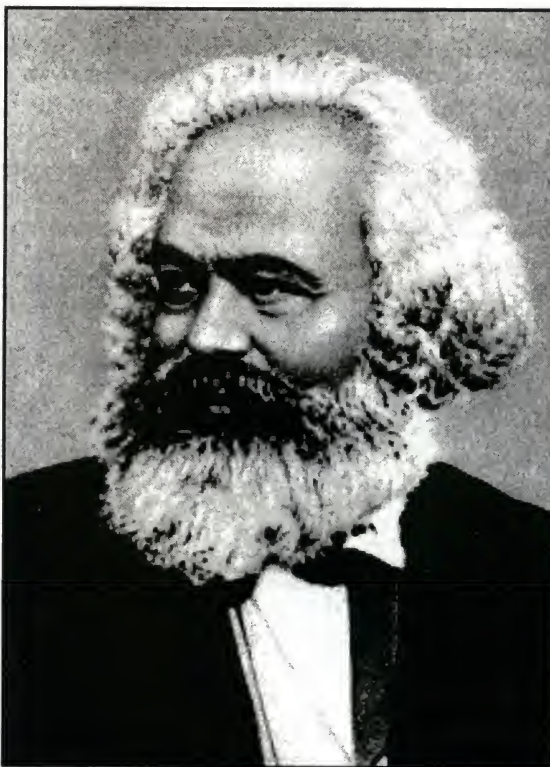
1848—the year the Manifesto was written. After assuming power, as they did throughout Western Europe in the form of parliamentary Monarchies, the capitalists began to industrialize the nation and to exploit the working class. Marx merely

hypothesized as to what the next stage in this process would be. He believed that the workers in these countries would unite and revolt against the capitalists and assume power in a "dictatorship of the proletariat." What Mr. Young failed to delineate in his article, just as Lenin and Stalin did, is that "dictatorship of the proletariat" refers to the proletariat as a class. Marx was calling for workers to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and to take power as a class—not in the form of an elite bureaucracy. Dictatorship of, and dictatorship over the proletariat are entirely different things.

Marxist-Leninism is a mutated theory of Marxism. It takes the basic formula of Marxism, and fills in the gaps in Marx's theory of dialectical evolution with authoritarian practices. Marx never described exactly how the revolution would come about, and Lenin

had his own plans which were not in accordance with what Marx actually wrote. In 1917, Russia was just beginning to enter the second stage of historical development. The serfs had only just been emancipated as recently as 1861. Attempts to modernize the economy had been largely ineffective, and Russia was still a Tsarist, feudal nation.

Predominantly populated by peasant farmers, Russia had a very small proletariat. Workers were concentrated only in the big cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. The revolution of 1917 was a capitalist revolution. The liberals stirred revolt in order to force the Tsar into creating a parliamentary democracy, with the Tsar as a titular head. However, before these reforms could fully take root, and less than one year



Karl Marx: handsome eligible bachelor. Call 1-900-RED -HORE

after they were implemented, the Bolsheviks began a revolution of their own. They captured the major cities with minimal support and limited forces.

Lenin had taken it upon himself to force Russia into changes it was far from prepared for. Lenin did create a bureaucratic monster, as Mr. Young attests, and his party purges and revolutionary tactics laid the groundwork for true totalitarians such as Stalin. But he was not a marxist...

Lenin did create a bureaucratic monster, as Mr. Young attests, and his party purges and revolutionary tactics laid the groundwork for true totalitarians such as Stalin. But he was not a marxist...

groundwork for true totalitarians such as Stalin. But he was not a Marxist in the the true sense of the term, as he had already broken the major rule of historical development. Lenin attempted to reform his views late in his career. He instituted a New Economic Policy which would allow a more gradual approach toward Communism, as Trotsky had envisioned. As Lenin lay dying, he wrote his last letters urging Party members not to allow Stalin to take power. Unfortunately, it was too little, too late, as Stalin already held enough sway within the Party to assume complete control.

Stalin committed some of the worst atrocities the world has ever known, killing off and starving to death perhaps as many as 30 million people—far more than were killed in Hitler's Holocaust.

Social democracy, as exhibited in Germany and Scandinavia (today), is the wave of the future. A corporatist welfare state, in which government works with business and labor to accommodate everyone's needs, is the next best thing to a Communist Utopia.

At this point, Marxism had been completely abandoned, and "Communism" had become so distorted as to be unrecognizable. The totalitarian rule of Stalin and his successors were the result of a unique blend of Russian backwardness, mistrust of the West, and Stalin's own extreme paranoia. To call the Soviet Union a Marxist state is a complete misnomer—especially since a Marxist state is an oxymoron, as true Communism *a la* Marx would abandon the state along with class.

I would urge Mr. Young, or anyone who criticizes Marxist ideology, to gain a better understanding of what Marxism really means. As for Communist organizations today, I do not know if they are in compliance with Marxist views or not. I must admit that the

era for Marxist theory is over. History did not follow the path described by Marx, and a technological revolution has usurped the workers' revolution, and nearly eradicated them as a class. A huge middle class, and a service sector which outnumbers industrial labor, does not make poverty or exploitation in America any less prevalent. In fact, the United States today has incarcerated more of its citizens than Stalinist Russia. But the face of capitalism has changed, and any attempted revolution by the workers would have disastrous results, as in the Soviet Union.

Social Democracy, as exhibited in such countries as Germany and Scandinavia, is the wave of the future. A corporatist, welfare state, in which government works with business and labor to accommodate everyone's needs, is the next best thing to a Communist utopia—which may or may not ever be achieved. In America today, economic Liberalism and a tradition of individualism have put our own meager welfare state

in peril. America is a unique case, and we must work to find our own path to economic as well as social and political equality.

...True Marxism is an enduring, albeit abstract, historical analysis. Rather than adopting distorted versions of aging theories, or maligning them for their limitations, we should work to refine them.

The condition of the former Soviet states and other post-Communist countries today, is largely due to huge historical mistakes and misunderstandings. Let us not make those same ideological errors. We should engage in a meaningful dialogue concerning social theories and "what is to be done." However, it is imperative that we enter this dialogue with fuller knowledge as to what we are debating. Marxism is not an "opiate of the crackpots," as Mr. Young suggests. "Marxism" as interpreted by such groups as the Spartacists may be—but true Marxism is an enduring, albeit abstract, historical analysis. Rather than adopting distorted versions of aging theories, or maligning them for their limitations, we should work to refine them. It is time to finish the work that was begun with the Communist Manifesto. It's time to start our own revolution of ideas.

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ZOMBIES TAKE OVER THE NATION!

How the 1934 California Gubernatorial Election changed American Politics Forever

BY TYLER CABOT

Cheap slogans flash across my box of blue-light. I love this shit. Show me some more graphics, chlorine-whitened smile, and a twelve hundred-dollar suit—I'll vote for you.

On November 3rd, the zombies reappeared as they do on every first Tuesday of November—election day. Halloween is nothing compared to this horror show. Halloween ghouls merely wander the streets, take my candy, and smash a few pumpkins. The repercussions of their actions are usually harmless: a few belly aches and some stray candy wrappers.

The voting zombies are a different story; they are naïve sponges which absorb any political trash thrown at them, then regurgitate this rubbish back up in the form of their votes on election day.

I am scared beyond belief. The future of my country is continually decided by a majority of voters whose balloting is based largely upon which political campaign's advertising company made a greater impact upon them. The average American voter is informed by filtered, multi-million dollar television shorts. Voters today, consciously or unconsciously, have become zombies—thinking in sound bites and voting upon subliminal impulses. The voter hears a catchy slogan, and yells "right-on," perhaps without thinking what his exclamation means, or what its tangible implications will be. Zombies haunt the polls, and I can't leave the haunted house which our electoral system has become. Political smears are catch phrases; ideology is passé.

In principle, our governmental system seems fair. It radiates such words as "liberty" and "freedom." It brings to mind images of the Boston Tea Party, and Washington crossing the Delaware. We dream in romantic reverie of the room and moment our forefathers validated the constitution. But in action, and practicality, the system is broken. The truly informed voter is nearly extinct, merely a cliché which exists solely within textbooks, and the minds of political idealists.

To fully understand the mutation America's elective franchise has undergone, and the far-reaching implications of this transformation, one should look at the basis of this change; the point at which the American system of suffrage took its turn for the worst.

The revolution began in the 1930s, for the same reason the practice has continued: people in the powerful and rich echelons of society wish to manipulate the government for their own gains. Political parties believe they can buy votes and power by pouring

money into smear campaigns. They are right.

The smear campaign mold was cast during California's 1934 gubernatorial election. Muckraking author Upton Sinclair came out of nowhere to win the Democratic nomination. Republicans, scared and shocked, undertook a way to beat a man who was gaining political momentum daily. A negative media battle was focused upon Sinclair, and the precedent for negative smear campaigns was set.

At the time of the election, California had fallen victim to the depression just as its neighbors in the East had. The time was ripe for change, and Sinclair believed he had the correct equation to bring California out of poverty. This quotient was in the form of his EPIC (End Poverty In California) plan, a blue-print for social change that was based upon numerous Socialist tents. Sinclair preached "Production for Use, Not for Profit," and the people began to listen.

Sinclair's ideas for change were radical, yet appealing to a public which was looking to escape economic peril. The public wanted change; Sinclair was their supposed savior, even if many of his ideas were Socialist in base. Sinclair swept the Democratic primary, winning more votes than all seven of the other Democratic candidates combined.

Fear grew in the heart of the establishment. Republicans, and others who commanded the current political structure, were not willing to relinquish their control if Sinclair won the election. A solution was sought, a counteragent which would destroy Sinclair and preserve the status quo. The media driven smear campaign was born, and American politics was changed forever.

California state conservatives mobilized. Two advertising agencies were brought forth to lead the charge against Sinclair: Lord and Taylor and Campaign's Inc. One political analyst, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. described the conservative political tactic as "a new advance in the art of public relations, in which advertising men now believed they could sell or destroy a political candidate as they sold one brand of soap, and defamed its competitor."

The advertising companies searched through Sinclair's published literary works from the prior twenty years. They extrapolated excerpts, edited, and presented them out of context in millions of pamphlets and upon thousands of billboards. What resulted were quotes which painted Sinclair as a staunch anti-American Communist.

These quotations serve as the forerunner to the

current political advertising strategy of quoting political opponents out of context in television ads. Both served the same purpose: to sully the public's image of an opponent, influencing voters to cast their ballots in the other direction. Most of today's campaign commercials utilize the same tactic, by dismantling speeches and only focusing upon small blemishes within a politician's record.

The media barrage continued further, in an even more powerful medium, film. Hollywood, led by Louis B. Mayer, feared Sinclair with his proposed tax-hike upon movie studios and state-run studios. To avert fiscal loss, Mayer set out to help in the Republican push to destroy Sinclair.

Three movie shorts aimed at scaring the public into voting against Sinclair were backed by Mayer. Played before movies in theaters, these shorts depicted disheveled transients not only voting and supporting Sinclair's campaigning, but flocking from other parts of the country in search of hand-outs in California. The model was set for negative television advertisements to emanate.

The Republican campaign proved too much for Sinclair to reckon with. On the first Tuesday of November, 1934 the first ever voting zombies appeared in California. After weeks of reading libelous

materials regarding Sinclair and viewing Mayer's skewed movie shorts, the educated voter died. Balloters were stopped and silenced subconsciously by a power greater than them. Lies replaced ideology, and Sinclair lost by more than two hundred thousand votes.

The players in the 1934 election are irrelevant, whether Democrat, Republican, Independent, Reform, or Socialist. The importance of EPIC is not that Sinclair lost, nor that Sinclair had Socialist leanings. The importance of EPIC is the transformation of the electoral process. The importance of EPIC is that voters who knew what they wanted were tricked into voting against the very principles which they believed would lead them back to prosperity. EPIC set the stage for the debacle, which is America's current campaigning practice.

Political advertising still refuses to focus upon substantive issues such as US policy upon Bosnia, trade, abortion, or education. Rather, campaigns focus upon dirt. They dig up what they can find, and what they can't they create. Politicians are smart, and they learned from the 1934 campaign: zombies win elections.



Vespers: Reflections

by Daniele Anastasion

Last night I laid my life's hopes and dreams on a scrap of paper and placed them in a fish bowl. I watched them float. I watched them sink. Slowly, waving, eyes closed, to the bottom. Several people sitting in our circle did the same. To us, it was a sea. A fish bowl filled with ten or so scraps of paper, each making its own clear blue path to the bottom. Me, I was a ship bobbing on the surface of a water lit by candlelight and a roomful of steady eyes. Anchored.

It is hard to have ritual in a life that claims no religious tradition at all. For those of us who are spiritually promiscuous, Vespers at Wesleyan has given us a nice nondenominational chance to attempt some kind of ceremony. To capture the essence of Vespers, this space that claims no banner or definition, is somewhat difficult. It is loose. It is light. It borrows and blends. All the good things from the world's everything. It is a place where you and dozens of other people can light a candle and fill the tiny chapel with the shadows of all the people you've ever loved. You might say that we just sit around in the dark a lot, with candles, and Gary, the Protestant Chaplain, who, I don't believe, has once mentioned God or Christ. Just Audre Lorde here and there. You could never guess the faith of the person sitting next to you, whether she's a Christian, a Jew, or just an Atheist hungry for the free vegetarian

meal that will follow. But even Atheists need ritual. It is something to come back to. Something that reminds you to say hello to yourself. Something that, when I get around to it, makes me marvel at my ability to ignore my own background noise.

Wesleyan. Lots of fish. Big colorful ones. A damn good pond, but one that can easily make you feel like a tadpole. We are swimming upstream, each of us, for some cause or another, in a world that demands the utmost articulation of our ideas. A world dominated by issues, objectives, and rationalizations. The things that we are inclined to tally up and score. And so I find myself drifting back to the chapel every Wednesday night so I can do something like sail a piece of myself in a fish bowl. Or light a candle for a special word. Like "blue." Or "now." Or "wing."

Vespers is a place for the fragments. It allows the tiny things that nobody really cares about in the onslaught of the day—the half thoughts that remain unrepresented in the steady machinery of the logical mind. The whispers that get lost in the undertow. The feeling that you simply don't want to be coherent anymore. Vespers is a place where Christians, Buddhists, and Pagans alike can float in fish bowls and pray to Poseidon. Privately together. With the Protestant Chaplain.



RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

LIVING WITH NEW ENGLAND'S AGING NUKES

by Brian Edwards-Tiekert

In 1972, President Richard Nixon promised that the US would have 1,000 commercial atomic reactors by the year 2000. Nuclear power—so the rhetoric went—was the cleanest source of energy available and would soon be “too cheap to meter.” People soon discovered the reality: that nuclear energy is dirtier than anything we ever imagined and too expensive to even turn a profit.

The cost of safely building, operating, and decommissioning reactors turned out to be far higher than any estimates. Our government has always subsidized nuclear power, largely because it can re-process spent fuel into bombs. Before any companies would agree to operate reactors, it had to pass the Price-Handerson Act. This limits company liability to 1/3 the damages and cleanup cost of any accidents—taxpayers pick up the other 2/3. Even so, building commercial plants has bankrupted more than one utility. The cost of building two reactors at the Seabrook Station in New Hampshire was originally estimated at \$850 million; it took an estimated \$7 billion to build *one*, and the second was terminated with \$900 million already sunk into it. Even running the plants is costly: under current deregulation of the power industry utilities are closing reactors just to stay competitive.

Every stage of the production process—from uranium mining to processing to power generation to the disposal of radioactive waste—leaks radiation into the environment and quite literally kills people. In the mines (90% of which are on native land) radon gas causes lung cancer in workers, the piles of tailings left outside the mines leech radioactivity into the groundwater. Reactors are permitted—indeed, *designed*—to release ‘minimal’ amounts of radioactive material, and often release far more than that on the sly. We bury low-level waste in landfills, even though it is *impossible* to build a landfill that won’t leak (at the dump in Barnwell, SC—which is 46% African American and very poor—radioactivity got into the groundwater and so far has contaminated a 100-acre area). And they

still haven’t found a safe place to store high-level waste, the ‘spent’ fuel that will be unsafe for the next 240,000 years.

To date, the US has built only 130 of the Nixon’s 1,000 promised reactors, and only 103 of them are in operation. This is largely due to the campaigns citizen’s groups mounted when they discovered the dark

sides of nuclear power. In the late 1970s local organizing and acts of civil disobedience by groups like the Clamshell Alliance kept a number of plants from opening; in the 90’s groups like the Citizen’s Awareness Network (CAN) have forced reactors to close ahead of schedule by uncovering and publicizing safety problems that are too expensive to fix and too serious to ignore.

These groups consist mostly of people who live in reactor communities: people who wonder exactly *how much* of *what* the plant’s released since their children were born; people who know that on any day of the year something could go wrong at the plant and they wouldn’t be able to get out if they tried.

Imagine this: it’s 7AM on a clear October day in a small New England town. The sun rises over

tree-carpeted hills painted the with autumn colors. The shallow light warms the window of a house built before the civil war, it paints pink the columns in front of town hall, sparkles off the tin roofs on two silos in the distance. The birds wake up. A couple diesel delivery trucks rumble in. Someone starts frying bacon. And then, everywhere at once, sirens are screaming from the tops of telephone poles.

Front doors bang open, car doors slam shut, fathers shout orders at children and wives. Something happened at the plant. The first cars scream out of town. Traffic’s going fifty miles an hour, thirty, ten. They’re in the breakdown lane. They’re on the shoulder. They’re in the ditch. People are looking out their rear windows and praying the wind doesn’t turn their way, scared to roll down their windows in case it’s already in the air, wondering how much is in their lungs already. Five miles an hour. Some get out and



Photo: Daniele Anastasion



start running. Two miles an hour. The wind shifts.

This was the scenario playing in the heads of the hundred-some-odd marchers at the "Run for Your Life" rally just north of the Massachusetts border in Brattleboro, VT on Halloween. The idea was to act out an evacuation during a real accident. If the Vermont Yankee reactor were ever to melt down, the entire town of Vernon, VT would have to escape along a 7 mile stretch of one-lane highway with no shoulder and blind turns. The rally began at the reactor in Vernon, just across from the elementary school. It was a race—protesters had to trek ten miles to get out of the evacuation zone. Some rode bicycles, some coasted in rollerblades, some ran on foot; one even pushed another in a wheelchair. Two vans ran up the ranks of racers from behind, stopped the laggards one by one, informed them that they were dead, and drew a chalk outline on the asphalt before they drove them to the end. The finish line was the corporate offices for the nuclear plant, conveniently located—as organizer Debbie Katz pointed out—just outside of the evacuation zone, where executives and managers could fly out by helicopter if anything blew.

"We had a meteorologist run a model," she announced after the race, "In one hour, the plume from a meltdown could travel all the way to Amherst; it could get to central Vermont; it could get to New York State. In two hours it could be in Boston."

How do you get away from something like that if you don't have a helicopter? You don't. Sal Mangiagli, a CAN activist, once told me about evacuation plans for 'his' reactor in Haddam, CT. "I know a guy on the emergency board," he said. "He said that if that reactor ever goes, he's gonna go to the package store, bust open a window, grab a couple of bottles of liquor, and sit down on the corner and watch . . . because if that reactor goes, there's nothing he can do."

It was more than just another protest at a dirty, dangerous reactor—it was an event addressing the major difference between the executives who put reactors in towns, and the residents who try to get them out—the executives don't have to live in fear. It goes beyond the prospect of an apocalyptic meltdown: people from reactor communities have to deal with the knowledge that the plant

next door is killing them little by little, day by day.

Debbie Katz got to figure that out first hand. A few years ago she called Sidney Cobb, an epidemiologist who was doing a study on the area around Massachusetts' Pilgrim Reactor for Senator Kennedy, and asked him to study her area—the towns around the reactor in Rowe, MA. He told her that he didn't have the time and that it would be impossible to show statistically significant increases in disease in such an unpopulated area. She asked him if he would at least look at the data if she went to the trouble of collecting it all. He consented.

So she and other Members of Massachusetts's CAN chapter got to work. For over a year they collected information from hospitals and morgues, even tracked down people who'd lived in the community for a while and then moved out. They sent the data to Cobb. The next day Cobb called Debbie Katz. "I'm coming down there," he said.

Industry- and government-sponsored health-impact studies on nuclear power plants had examined everyone living within a 15-mile radius of the plant and turned up nothing. What Cobb and Katz did was to limit their study to towns in the plant's 'effluent pathway,' the area released radioactivity covers when you factor in prevailing winds, water flow, and air inversions over the river valley. What they found was this: a 1000% increase in children born with Down's Syndrome, statistically significant increases in Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma and Breast Cancer, and a large but not statistically significant increase in rate of Multiple Myeloma,

a blood cancer associated almost exclusively with Hiroshima survivors.

Later, she and CAN shut the reactor down for good: just before the plant was to receive a license extension from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), CAN exposed flagrant safety violations at the plant. Years of bombardment by radiation had left the reactor vessel extremely brittle; it could shatter during a rapid cool-down. The chance of melt-down at the reactor had gone from 1 in 1,000,000 to 1 in 10,000, and the NRC was going to let it keep running.



Photo: Daniele Anastasion

"I know a guy on the emergency board. He said that if that reactor ever goes, he's gonna go to the package store, bust open a window, grab a couple bottles of liquor, and sit down on the corner and watch.



The NRC and the nuclear companies have always been pretty cozy; it's no coincidence that a large number of NRC officials have lucrative jobs waiting for them in the nuclear industry when they retire. A decade old directive on 'enforcement discretion' lets the NRC neglect safety issues to save costs, and it was fully prepared to do so for Yankee Rowe, until CAN and other citizen's groups focused public attention on the issue, put pressure on the NRC, and stopped the plant permanently.

Most of our older commercial reactors are on their last legs. Inspectors keep discovering safety systems that were never fully installed, or not built up to design specifications. They've come across emergency devices that were never tested or maintained correctly, and grossly neglected pumps and sumps that could spell the difference between an accident and a meltdown. The NRC hasn't forced the plants in question to fix things.

These safety systems are increasingly important as the reactors age and the possibility of major systems failing increases. Like at Yankee Rowe, vital components have deteriorated faster under use than anyone expected. Deregulation of the utilities means that those plants that do stay open are under increasing pressure to cut costs—usually by cutting safety measures. Cutting costs means cutting shut-down time, and the biggest way the utilities do that is by servicing emergency systems while the reactor is on-line—of course, that means taking those emergency systems *off-line* while the reactor's *running*. At Millstone 1 Northeast Utilities reduced costs by cutting the NRC-mandated 250-hour cooling period for burnt fuel to 60 hours—at one point the work environment got so hot that workers' rubber boots melted to the floor.

Add these three factors together—aging reactors, poorly maintained safety systems that were insufficient from the start, and heavy pressure to keep costs down and reactors on-line—and you have a recipe for meltdown. This is the spectre haunting residents of reactor communities today. And yes, we at Wesleyan qualify as residents of a reactor community. Connecticut Yankee, the plant at Haddam Neck, the one Sal described the futility of running from, is less than eight miles from campus.

It's one of the dirtiest reactors in the country: over its operating life, it released over 120,000 curies of Tritium into the Connecticut River—that's ten times as much as any other reactor in the country. Two fuel

leaks during the plant's operation contaminated the surrounding land as far as a mile away.

As for safety: a series of inspections two years ago turned up a number of design flaws and unreliable components in the plant's safety systems. For 28 years, a piping system that supported the emergency core cooling system was too small to carry enough water to prevent a meltdown during a worst-case accident. The plant's four containment air recirculation (CAR) fans were declared inoperable after being tested under accident conditions. The containment sump, a device used to recover from a contained accident, was clogged with over 250 gallons of sludge and debris, and had a hole in its screen measuring 3 inches by 3 feet.

On Labor day weekend of 1996 (during orientation at Wesleyan), the reactor came within 52 minutes of a loss-of-coolant reaction that could have wound up as 'harmless' as Three Mile Island or worse than Chernobyl (which raised childhood thyroid cancer rates in California). Workers had disconnected temperature and water level gauges

in preparation for a fuel-rod change that was rescheduled. An unlicensed worker had connected a valve the wrong way and let nitrogen leak into the system. This started

pushing coolant water out of the reactor and onto the containment vessel floor. It took the plant workers three days to figure out what was happening, and when they did, the emergency pump they needed to engage to fix things seized. It was a fluke that the plant didn't blow up—the nitrogen bubble reached equilibrium and the system stopped losing water just before the core would have overheated.

That plant, thanks to the work of local CAN activists Sal Mangiagli and Rosemary Bassilakis, is now shut down for good. But that doesn't mean we're out of the woods. Once a plant starts 'decommissioning,' all the permanent NRC supervisors go home, and all operations are solely in the hands of the utility's workers—the same ones who almost let the plant go critical. So as those capable hands juggle the plant's 32,000 fuel rods into an already-overcrowded cooling tank, as they strip the plant of its most dangerous parts, pack them up, and ship them down Route 9 on their way to Barnwell, SC, bear this in mind: at eight miles from Haddam Neck, Wesleyan is on the emergency evacuation plan—if you wake up one morning to sirens in Haddam, then get on 91 north and run like hell.



Connecticut Yankee, the plant at Haddam Neck, is less than eight miles from campus

It's one of the dirtiest reactors in the country

Upcoming Events:

Nov 17: Sal Mangiagli give a speech entitled "The Ethics of Nuclear Waste: Decommissioning Nuclear Reactors and the Meltdown of Democracy" at 8PM in the Woodhead Lounge.

Dec 3: Michael Steinberg will speak on reactors and public health at 8PM in the Woodhead Lounge.

The Citizen's Awareness Network (CAN) meets on campus every other Tuesday at 7PM in PAC002. The next meetings are on Nov. 17 and Dec. 1. Check out their web page at <http://www.shaysnet.com/~can>.

ERNIE BUTTS

MAYOR OF MIDDLETOWN'S NORTH END

by DANIEL DYLAN YOUNG

Nearly a decade ago, Ernest Butts attests, he had a particularly stirring dream. The dream told him he must work to "uncomplex the complexities" in this confusing, fast-paced, modern world. It inspired him to write a play entitled "My Community." He has been working on this drama ever since.

Through this inspirational dream Ernest also came to see that "people don't do things because they want to—take this girl here," he motions to a young friend of his whom he will later describe as a sex fiend, "she doesn't do what she really wants to because what other people say has gotten all mixed up into her subconscious and —"

The woman angrily interrupts Ernest's sermon, "What you sayin'? I got my own mind!"

A smile steals over Ernest's face, "See, they all say that, they all say that they've got their own mind."

I have to smile as I inquire, "Do you have YOUR own mind, Ernest?" Of course, comes the confident reply, he has his own mind because *he* listens to special audio tapes which help to free him from subconscious programming. In return I ask, "How do you know that the tapes aren't just giving you new programming in your subconscious, instead of taking things out?"

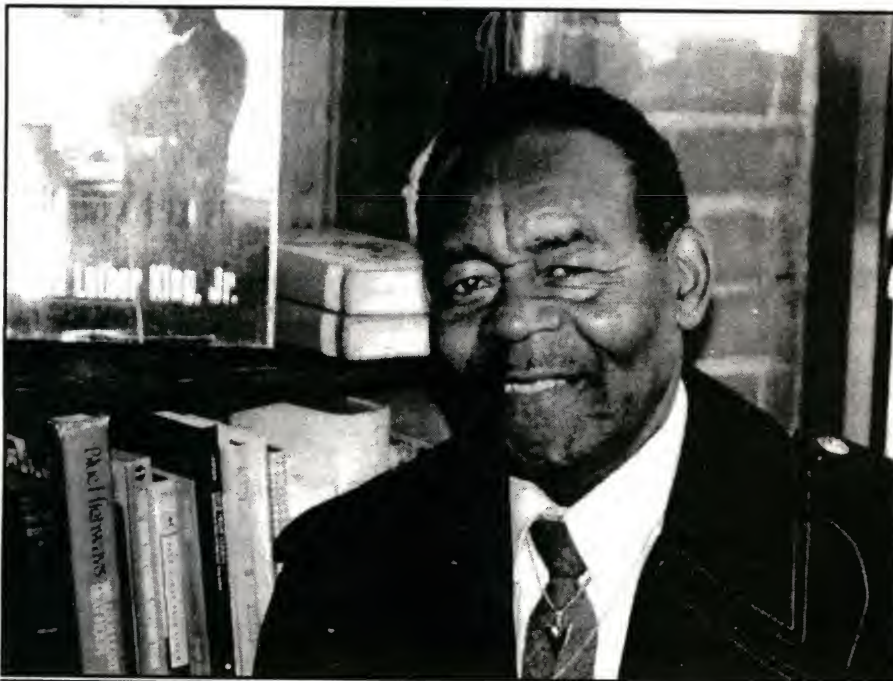
His reply is quick and off the cuff. "I got these tapes over at the health food store, at *It's Only Natural*

in the Clocktower Mall. *They're good.*"

Unusual sermons like this have given Ernest Eugene Butts the reputation of a local character. Yet there is more than just eccentric pageantry to this 73 year old African American man who adorns himself with a large golden ankh and buttons bearing the messages "Walk The Walk" and "Tell Me Where It Hurts." There are reasons why his friends and neighbors in Middletown refer to him as the "Mayor of the

North End."

There are reasons why the *Hartford Courant* published an article describing him as the "unofficial mayor" of Middletown, and why this same paper quotes his comments on local events with an air of authority. And, as I was to learn, there is more than just egotism behind Ernest referring to himself as Middletown's



Ernie Butts at the Buttonwood Tree. Photo by Daniele Anastasion.

H.N.I.C. — "Head Nigger In Charge."

The North End's unofficial Mayor holds court every day between 11 AM to 3 PM in the **Buttonwood Tree**. This is a non-profit bookstore and performance space at the corner of Liberty and North Main Street, which Ernest manages during the day. It is here that you will find the throne from which he dispenses wisdom to his confused neighbors—be they college students or crack dealers. Ernie Butts is a veritable encyclopedia of information eclectically culled from popular street wisdom, academic and Biblical readings, and his own unique and individualistic life.



On my first afternoon consulting with him, Ernest sank deep into his easy-chair, closed his eyes, folded his hands, and spoke on the subject of race and religion. The inspiration for this discourse was a tall, lanky African American woman in her late twenties who had come into the Buttonwood Tree to speak with him. Dressed in her Sunday best, she had just returned from morning services. Ernest apparently could not resist speaking to her in an anti-religious vein. "Why you want to go to a church where you have less when you leave than when you come in?" She did not answer him, but instead began teasing him about his age.

Ernie would not let the matter rest, however. When her evasiveness began to annoy him he threw up his hands, looked me straight in the eye, and said, "If you want to get anywhere in this world, watch what black people do and *don't* do it."

In response to this the woman called Ernest a decrepit Uncle Tom. With youthful speed he jumped up to chase her out onto the sidewalk of North Main Street. On his return he sank back into his chair and continued with his anti-religious discourse. "The black people here in Middletown have to be the stupidest people in the world. The Chinese people here, they have six restaurants and no churches. But the black people—they got 25 churches and *no restaurants!* Black folk jump up and down in Church that they're saved—how the hell you saved if you gotta go to work the next day and worry about getting laid off?"

Economic issues were partly behind Ernest's own choice to join the Nation of Islam Mosque #14 when Malcolm X opened it in Hartford in the mid-1950s. He has since abandoned Islam for a less sectarian belief that: "God is above -isms—God is the ALL." However, he still speaks with great respect for his early spiritual leader. Besides teaching them new spiritual and moral ideals, Malcolm X urged the members of the Hartford Mosque to start their own businesses. Through entre-

"Black folk jump up and down in Church that they're saved . . . how the hell you saved if you gotta go to work the next day and worry about getting laid off?"

preneurship, Malcolm X hoped that his people could free themselves from continued economic enslavement.

At the time of his conversion Ernie was working for the *Pratt and Whitney* plant in Hartford as a

machinist making airplane parts. In retrospect, he remarked that conditions at the factory did not seem to him to be so different from the conditions under which

"You know what Malcolm X said about smoking? When you see a man with a cigar in his mouth, what you got is fire at one end and a fool at the other."

his slave ancestors had worked the plantations of Georgia. When I asked him what exactly he meant by this statement, Ernie replied that even at Pratt and Whitney he found that, "Black is beautiful, tan is grand, but white is the color of the big boss man. The big boss man wasn't going around the fields on a white horse anymore—stead he's driving up to the factory in a big white Cadillac."

After converting to Islam, Ernest became a freelance photographer. The Polaroid camera was an excit-

ing new piece of technology, and he could make decent money on a flexible schedule by taking people's pictures at weddings, night clubs or even funerals. Ernie has since worked as a disc jockey, florist, cab driver, and has even been a restaurant owner. Now he is semi-retired, collecting social security and occasionally selling magnets for medical purposes. When I asked him if he was a shrewd businessman, Ernie replied, "Yes—because I know that you shouldn't trade health for money. You just need enough money to live on. When you start making more then you start to be under all sorts of stress, which is what gives you diseases."

Ernie also has a parable to go with his opinions on the work ethic. Once, long ago, a white man came to Africa and saw an African sitting by a river. The white man said to the African, "You should come to America!" The African asked him why, and the white man replied, "So that you can work and make a lot of money." Again the African inquired as to why he would want to do such a thing. "So that when you get old you can retire, and just sit around fishing," the white man answered him. To this the African replied with finality, "I'm already retired."

Humble Beginnings

Ernest Eugene Butts has not always been so wise and exalted. He began life as the son of a taxi driver in Milledgeville, Georgia. His small hometown, which he thinks contained around 15,000 people during his youth, lies about 104 miles from Atlanta. Ernest was

the middle child in a family of nine. Since at that time "most everybody owned their own house," Ernest's family did too, and even had a small garden plot. He lived in this family home until 1943, when he reached his legal adulthood and found himself going off to fight in WWII.

At least in retrospect, the prospect of the war did not seem to frighten Ernie very much. He saw the Army Air Corps as a chance to get out of the South, where "segregation was so rampant." He hoped to be stationed in New York or Ohio, where he thought that the race situation would be better. Instead he was sent off for training in a string of southern cities which included a several month stint in Mississippi. Finally he found himself in New Caledonia, an island in the Pacific which was a staging area for the important battles being waged at Guadalcanal.

When the incidents at Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended WWII, Ernest managed to get his discharge from the army while still overseas in the Philippines. He went on to join the Merchant Marines, and worked as cook on their supply ships. As a Merchant Marine he had the opportunity to see Japan, Guam, and the Philippines. He left the Philippines when the native Hukbalahap guerrillas began agitating for Communist revolution. For propaganda purposes they tried to recruit American servicemen over to their side, but Ernest refused to work for the Communists. Mr. Butts seems almost as critical of organized socialism as he is of organized religion.

Ernie returned home to Georgia around 1948, a world traveler. A year later he married Mary Louvenia Cawthon, a woman who he describes as his "childhood sweetheart" (or at least one of them). Together they moved to Hartford in 1952, where he worked at Pratt and Whitney and she bore and began raising three daughters. When Louvenia died in child-birth with their fourth daughter in 1956, Ernest left factory life for the more flexible schedule of a freelance photographer and disc jockey. This

freed up more time for the struggle of raising four daughters. He moved the whole family to Middletown, Connecticut in 1962. The rest, as they say, is history. Local history anyway.

Magnetic Fields

A friend of Ernie's comes into the Buttonwood Tree to ask him for a dollar with which to buy a pack of cigarettes. To this request he replies, "You know what Malcolm X said about smoking? When you see a man with a cigar in his mouth, what you got is fire at one end and a fool at the other."

"You know, Steve . . . there's four things that don't exist: time,

Ernie's visitor, an amicable African-American man looking to be in his early 30's, laughs at this attack on his vices, and tries to explain to that he is going to quit smoking very soon. He then brings up the fact that today is Columbus Day. Ernie quickly

"From a materialist viewpoint, those things don't exist because you can't get a piece of them."

chimes in with his own unique views about the European discovery of the Americas: "If I got the registration for

my car here in my pocket, you can't just go out in the streets and say that you 'discovered' it. So if the Indians are there all along doing their thing, how did the white man just come and 'discover' America?"

On this note Ernie's friend departs enlightened (but no richer). Mr. Butts turns his attention to Steve, a white man in his 40's with short grayish hair and a beard, who founded and runs the Buttonwood Tree. Ernie's ruminations lead him to one of his favorite brain stumpers, which I was to hear several times during the course of our consultations. However on this occasion it does not work out quite as planned. "You know Steve—there's four things that don't exist: time, space, religion and color."

"If I got the registration for my car here in my pocket, you can't just go out in the streets and say that you 'discovered' it. So if the Indians are there all along doing their thing, how did the white man just come and 'discover' America?"

Steve is busy moving chairs and tables around to prepare for a big jazz show to take place that night in the Buttonwood Tree. He does not even pause in his labor to answer Ernie. "Well you can keep the rest, but color exists."

Mr. Butts replies triumphantly, "All right

Steve, than give me a slice of color!"

To this Steve slowly and slyly throws back at him, "Ernie—you are a slice of color."

Steve dashes out of the Buttonwood Tree on an errand, and Ernie channels his introspection about the nature of reality in my direction. "From a materialistic viewpoint, those things don't exist because you can't get a piece of them." When I ask whether he

the nature of reality in my direction. "From a materialistic viewpoint, those things don't exist because you can't get a piece of them." When I ask whether he thinks that there is more to the world than the material, he sighs, sinks back in his easy chair, and replies, "Yes, but that's the view that is most common today."

"When you're in a steel car you're out of the magnetic field. That's why people always leave their windows down a little. They say it's for air, but they got air conditioning. They say that they want 'some real air': ain't no 'real air,' it's the magnetic field."

We are living in an artificial world, and it's gotten so that we can't distinguish the artificial from the real." Suddenly he sits up and motions out the window at the cars whizzing by outside on Middletown's Main Street and at Highway 9 beyond it. "See that highway out there? We had to cut down trees, which are real things, to make that highway, which is an artificial thing. We wrap our lives around artificial things. That's why you got kids these days saying, 'I'm gonna commit suicide!' They got themselves all wrapped up in all these artificial things. Now if they just got out in the country where they could see real things, like corn growing . . ."

He follows this with an exaltation of the Native Americans who, according to Ernie, were in touch with the real and natural world partially through their correct orientation with the Earth's magnetic fields. Modern Americans, on the other hand, suffer mentally and physically due to our poor magnetic alignment. As Ernie sees it, magnetic fields are an essential facet of industrial society's alienation from, and destruction of, the natural environment. "When you're in a steel car you're out of the magnetic field. That's why people always leave their windows down a little—they say it's for air, but they got air conditioning. They say that they want 'some real air.' Ain't no 'real air,'—it's the magnetic field they want. It's the same way when you're in a big building like the Pentagon . . . that's why people say that they got to get out and get some fresh air. But the magnetic field is being depleted by computers, cars, jet planes same as the water and the ozone."

Mr. Butts' discourses extend beyond the range of race or environmentalism and into almost every field imaginable. Through my time with him I became aware of the "Planetarium Club"—an association of extraterrestrials who have been observing humankind since our first experiments with nuclear weapons in the

1940s. I also learned that the Cold War was not in truth precipitated by an ideological conflict between the United States and Soviet Russia. In fact it was a veiled attempt by the world's leaders to build up an arsenal of nuclear weapons in order to guard against extraterrestrial attack. This revelation was as stunning to Ernie as it was to me: "I had to go to bed for 40 years thinking that Russia was going to bomb us, when all along . . ."

My Community

Why, you might ask, has a man of Ernie's wisdom and talent chosen to spend so much of his life in obscure and economically floundering Middletown? "Well it's a small place that's gradually been turning into a family. Here in Middletown I got access to the mayor's office whenever I want it." This opportunity for open participation in local government allows Ernie to air to a wider public his views on the problems of Middletown's poor, black community. He has long been a vocal member of the Middletown NAACP. In the last decade he has also helped to form the North End Action Team (NEAT). This new community activist group is working against governmental neglect, drug addictions, slum-lords and other problems which plague what the *Hartford Courant* once called "the troubled north side of Middletown."

Ernie feels that such public access to officials is the only way for government to ever work properly. "Who did the Bible say you were supposed to serve? The servants! Politicians supposed to serve the people, but when they get power they tend to form their own little

"Who did the Bible say you were supposed to serve? The servants! Politicians supposed to serve the people, but when they get power they tend to form their own little cliques. Then when people start to notice and complain they go and make armies and police to protect their own power with force."

cliques. Then when people start to notice and complain, they go and make armies and police to protect their own power with force—but in the end force *never* works . . ."

How does Mr. Butts see his own position in this community? Despite his Mayor-ship and his title of "H.N.I.C.," he vociferously preaches a doctrine of humility. "Exalting yourself, that don't have any great meaning. Look at Mother Teresa. She didn't go around trying to uplift herself. She helped the people around her, and the people did the uplifting. Before Martin Luther King was killed, someone once asked him what

he would want on his tombstone—something about his college degrees, or all the awards he had won, or what? He told them that all he would want there was the words, 'He tried to help somebody.'"

In the end, Ernest's place in the larger scheme of things comes back to his sworn task of uncomplexing the complexities. This is what he is doing when he holds court in the North End. This is what he is doing when he tells a short and stocky young woman who visits him often, "There is four kinds of people: (1) the people who are just out for themselves, (2) the people who is focused just on their one group or clique, (3) the humanitarians who is always doing things for everybody else — and (4) then there's sex fiends like you!"

When this same woman complains to him about feeling unexplainably ill, he tells her, "You should go up to the old folks home on Court Street and help someone who is really sick!" Once she has left he turns to me and explains, "People always feeling bad about themselves 'cause they never think about anybody else *but* themselves."

There are certainly complexities and seeming inconsistencies in Ernie's behavior. He will deliver harsh, negative judgments like this upon foolish friends who he clearly cares about deeply. He has dedicated his final years to helping others, yet he can often dismiss his neighbors or all humankind in an offhand manner. For example, Ernie routinely places chairs outside the Buttonwood Tree for the crowds that spill out from St. Vincent's soup kitchen next door. One day I observed someone come in to the Buttonwood Tree soaking wet and complaining of the sudden downpour outside. Ernie seemed very disappointed that none of the people loitering out front had bothered to move the chairs back inside when the rain began. "The more I learn about people, the better I like dogs," he pronounced.

For many who have managed to get past his cryptic exhortations and irascible exterior, Ernest Butts has become a friend and a prophet. He has an answer for just about any question, and when his theories don't seem to ring true to you, it's usually because you've misunderstood them. He also possesses an unmatched warmth, charm and energy which has certainly not waned with age. A person never forgets their first encounter with Ernie, whether they come away



Photo: Daniele Anastasion

considering him a sage or a crank. After my own initial interaction with him nearly a year and a half ago I remember coming away with the impression, no doubt due to his constant use of Biblical quotes to support his arguments, that he was some kind of ultra-conservative Bible thumper.

During my last in a series of interviews with Ernest about his life and views, I asked him how his play "My Community" was coming, and if he had been working on it much recently. Sunk deep into his easy chair, eyes closed and big smile spreading across his face, he replied, "We working on it *right now*. All this talking you and I been doing—it's all been helping with that. What do you think we been doing?"

It's nice to know that you can be of service, especially to someone like Mr. Butts.

CRIMINALIZING CANNABIS

HOW THE WAR ON WEED IS TEARING OUR NATION APART

Adam Hurter

"Prohibition will work great injury to the cause of temperance. It is a species of intemperance itself, for it goes beyond the bonds of reason in that it attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation and makes a crime out of things that are not crimes. A prohibition law strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our government was founded. -Abraham Lincoln

"Penalties against drug use should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself. Nowhere is this more clear than in the laws against possession of marijuana in private for personal use." President Jimmy Carter, 1977

The United States has a history of participating in costly and deadly wars. While many citizens think that the our country is at peace, we are actually in the midst of one of the most ignorant, racist, and expensive wars in history: the "War on Drugs." The Drug War is an attack on basic freedoms that promotes crime and violence, rather than preventing it. At the heart of this lies the prohibition of marijuana, the drug that causes almost as many arrests as all the others combined.

The war on Marijuana alone is estimated to cost American taxpayers about \$7.5 billion annually... just imagine what that money could do for education...

To understand the war on marijuana today, one must understand why it was outlawed in the first place.

For thousands of years, the marijuana plant, hemp, was used for many purposes, including medicine, fuel, clothing, rope, food and oil. Hemp was an important aspect of many different cultures, including the American one. George Washington was a well-

known advocate of the importance of hemp, and he is thought to have smoked marijuana.

With dramatic technological advances in the field of hemp being turned into paper in the 1920's, the

existing paper industries were greatly threatened. Anti-hemp propaganda began to be produced, initially due to the relentless and financially-driven mission of William Randolph Hearst, the extremely wealthy owner of the Hearst Paper Manufacturing Division and nearly all major paper, timber, and newspaper companies. Hemp meant trouble for Hearst.

The solution? Launch a massive yellow journalism campaign against marijuana. This involved a tabloid media explosion (think Monica Lewinsky, but even less accurate) around any car crash, theft, or other crime in which marijuana was thought to be

On Drugs and Race

Brian Edwards-Tiekert

When Slick Willy Hearst and the paper companies started up the "Reefer Madness" campaign in the '20s one of the shrewdest moves they made was to adopt a new name for the well-known hemp plant. "Marijuana" was a drug that most Americans hadn't heard of, even though most of them used "hemp" every day. It sounded sinister, alien . . . Mexican.

Drugs and race have always been intertwined in American politics: just as the quest to criminalize opium capitalized on anti-Chinese sentiment at the turn of the century, Hearst & Co.'s campaign against cannabis worked

through ingrained racism. The tabloids painted a clear picture: "Marijuana" was a drug *banditos* smoked before they went on killing sprees. Blacks smoked it in underworld voodoo jazz clubs. Santa Anna and his men were hopeless addicts when they butchered our heroes at the Alamo.

Fast-forward 70 years: in media and politics 'drugs' rivals 'Arab terrorists' for the title of 'biggest threat to civilization as we know it,' but the role of race has flip-flopped: once upon a time the powers-that-be played the race card to institutionalize drug prohibition, today they're playing the drug card to institutionalize racism.

In the mid-eighties the media informed us that a crack 'epidemic' was sweeping our inner cities: 'crack gangs' were fighting over territory with machine guns,

involved (i.e. they found a joint), accusations that most rapes of white females by black men could be attributed to marijuana, and hysterically inaccurate and misleading films such as "Reefer Madness" and "Marijuana- Assassin of Youth," which are seen as spoofs today, but which were taken dead seriously at the time.

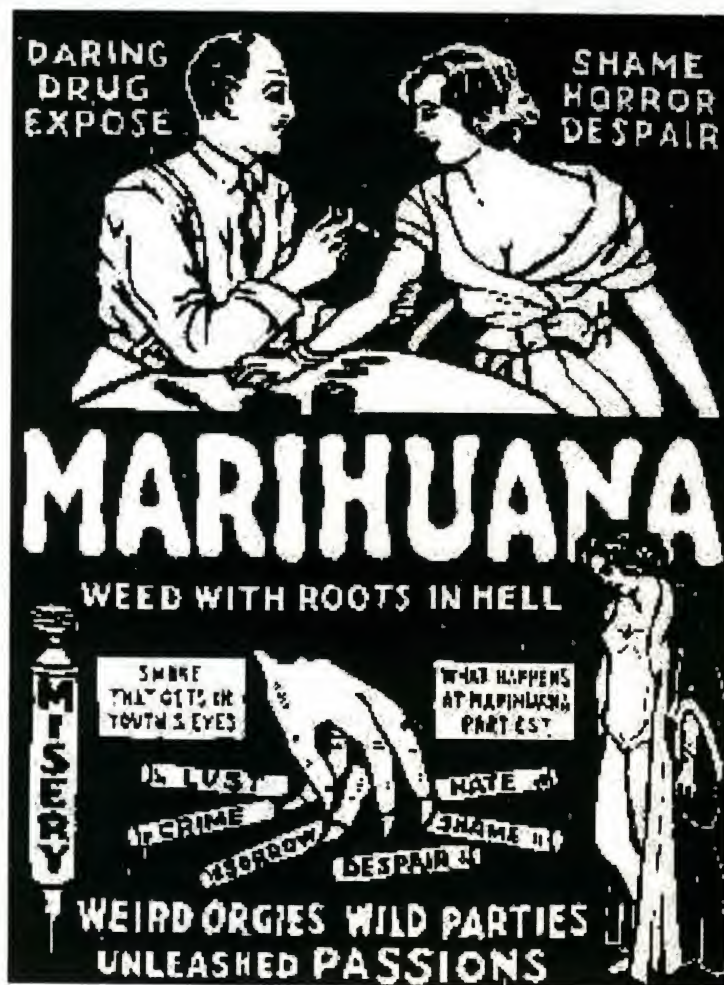
Hearst also demonized jazz music as "voodoo-satanic" and labeled its musicians as Blacks who smoked marijuana.

A gullible American public slowly bought into Hearsts' and racist propaganda and grew skeptical towards marijuana, but still it remained legal.

Enter Harry Aslinger: director of the newly-formed Federal Bureau of Narcotics, a racist who had been known to refer to African-Americans as "ginger-colored niggers," and who was fired from his position years later for censorship and blackmail. Aslinger was determined to criminalize marijuana, and he was willing to lie to do that.

In 1937 the American Medical Association (AMA) stated that it was strongly against criminalization of marijuana. When Aslinger testified in front of Congress, he said the exact opposite. Along with that now-famous lie, he read pieces of Hearsts' yellow journalism that finally pushed a Congress that knew little about the issue over the edge. They declared that marijuana, the "assassin of youth," should be prohibited.

But that was then, right? Now there must be good reasons why marijuana and its smokers are demonized, right? Wrong. In fact, marijuana laws continue to get worse and worse. Non-violent and harmless pot smokers FLOOD our nation's prisons at a greater rate than ever before in 1998, a result of the purely political stance that politicians



A real Hearst propaganda advertisement from the "Reefer Madness" era.

must take to be "hard on drugs."

A misconception exists that possession of marijuana is a small criminal offense in today's system. Unfortunately, that is just not true.

'crack mothers' were selling their foodstamps to buy more drugs, 'crack babies' were born underweight, addicted, and—so the story went—brain-damaged (the media was quick to predict the birth of a new genetic underclass, but most studies found that 'crack babies' grow up perfectly normal). In television and in the movies, crack users and pushers were—and still are—predominantly black.

Politicians used the crack scare to jump on the 'tough on drugs' bandwagon and passed laws mandating sentences for crack possession a hundred times as strict as those for cocaine possession. Aside from the obvious injustice that a street dealer caught with \$50 worth crack could serve a longer sentence (five years mandatory minimum, no possibility of parole) than a wholesale supplier caught with \$50,000 of cocaine (which is, by the way,

what they use to *make* crack), the laws have a particularly racist edge when it comes to enforcement: though two thirds of crack users are white, nearly 90% of crack possession defendants in federal courts are black.

Crystal Methamphetamine, by contrast, has enjoyed little to no attention from media or law enforcement. The drug (in smokeable form) is marginally more addictive than crack, induces violent behavior, and has invaded poor communities in the West the same way crack did. The difference? It's mostly white kids buying it. The cops aren't cracking down, and the media—aside from when it briefly flirted with the prospect of smokable crystal meth ('ice') becoming the next crack ten years ago—has been silent.



Right now, over 60% of federal inmates are drug offenders. Only 13% are in for violent crimes. On average, about 642,000 people per year are arrested for marijuana offenses; an arrest occurs every fifty-four seconds.

Yet our government claims that these laws are necessary. It screams "morality" and "family values." But

there's nothing moral about the War on Drugs.

Marijuana laws do not support "family values." They break up families by putting otherwise law-abiding people in jail. 80% of female drug prisoners in the nation are mothers, and 70% are single parents. Meanwhile, the amount of women in jail for drug offenses has tripled since the inception of mandatory minimum sentences in 1986.

Some sentences are so harsh, it's sickening. A few years ago, an Oklahoma man named William Foster was growing marijuana for his rheumatoid arthritis. It was the only way he knew to relieve himself of the pain. When the government caught Foster, he was convicted and sentenced to ninety-three years in prison. His life is gone, and with him goes the lives of the family members he left behind. For what?

So that your and my tax dollars could pay for him to lose his freedom. After all, we have to get "harmful criminals" like Foster off of the streets! At what price? Each federal prisoner costs taxpayers about \$22,000 a year for food, housing, and clothing. The war on marijuana alone is estimated to cost American citizens about \$7.5 billion annually. Imagine what that money could do for education.

If we really cared about families, we'd want the murderers and the rapists off the street. But those are exactly the people who are being released early from jail to make room for the non-violent pot smoker. The average convicted murderer and the rapist now average less than ten years

served in prison, while marijuana offenders serve out their mandatory sentences of five or ten years for first-time offenses. It is a national disgrace.

Smoking pot is a victimless crime. Its negative health effects are almost exclusively because of its

Both the average murderer and the average rapist now average significantly less than ten years served in prison, while marijuana offenders are serving their mandatory sentences of five or ten years for first-time offenses. It is a national disgrace.

effect on the lung; inhaling any smoke is bad for one's lungs. But the amount of smoke the average pot smoker inhales is much less than the cigarette smoker. Other health effects are very debatable, as government-funded studies (funded, of course, with the hopes of finding hidden harms in pot-smoking, in order to rationalize the laws) have repeatedly shown that there is little to no effect on any other part of the body. Some studies have even shown that marijuana enhances creativity.

As far as the toxicity of pot, repeated studies at places such as Harvard, UCLA, and Temple have shown that such a thing DOES NOT EXIST. While almost 400,000 people die annually due to tobacco smoke and over 125,000 die of alcohol poisoning, no one has ever directly died from marijuana. Many more die from the misuse of Advil.

If nothing else, the war on marijuana is a pathetic failure when it comes to deterrence. People still smoke pot just as much, regardless of threats of incarceration. Multiple surveys have shown that about 70 million Americans have

The paper industry was threatened when a machine that made it economical to extract the fibre from hemp—wood-pulp paper could become a thing of the past.

tried marijuana—over a third of our adult population. About 18 million have smoked in the last year, and about 10 million claim to be regular smokers. These people are our family, our friends, and our neighbors. They are not criminals. Even Newt Gingrich, who supports lifetime imprisonment for people who are caught smuggling 50 grams or more (less than two ounces) of marijuana into the country and the death penalty for some dealers, has admitted to smoking marijuana himself. And, as for our president... well, he "didn't inhale."

The War on Drugs is unjust and harmful to society. At the root of it is marijuana, the innocent little plant that could be used for so many great things, if given the chance. Yet the U.S. government continues its relentless pursuit of marijuana smokers. It ignores and distorts the facts, and it throws away taxpayer's money. Meanwhile, it floods the overcrowded prison system with non-violent drug offenders, while the true criminals remain free. The war on drugs stems from racism and greed, and it has no better intentions today. Isn't it time we called a truce?

Non-violent and harmless pot smokers FLOOD our nation's prisons at a greater rate than ever before in 1998, a result of the politically-vital stance that politicians must take as being "hard on drugs" and mandatory minimum sentences, the newest government ploy to keep pot smokers in prison for a long time.

offenders, while the true criminals remain free. The war on drugs stems from racism and greed, and it has no better intentions today. Isn't it time we called a truce?



The Harriet Beecher Stowe House: A Museum For the Status Quo

by Olivia deBree

Have you ever wanted to know how tall Harriet Beecher Stowe was? Me neither. But having paid \$4.50 for a tour of the Harriet Beecher Stowe House, in Hartford, Connecticut, and having been a conscientious tourist who listened carefully and dutifully followed on the heels of her tour guide, I can, with the utmost confidence, tell you Beecher Stowe measured only four feet, eleven inches tall. Also, she had seven kids. And to prevent ants from crawling up into her pie cupboard, Beecher Stowe put each leg of the cupboard in a cup of water, so the ants would fall in and drown on their climb up. After spending thirty minutes in this historic home, I can also confidently say that this is really all I learned.

Before my visit, I knew that Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I knew that the book addresses the issue of slavery and that it helped cause the Civil War. I expected to walk out of the House knowing more about her influence on American history. I didn't. Sadly, my tour guide's pitiful performance accurately reflects the dominance of the status quo's historical memory and our culture's materialism.

The Beecher Stowe Home recreates the space Harriet lived in. However, because the House chooses to showcase facts about the furniture and the gas lighting visitors don't hear about Stowe's observations of slavery, for instance, those she made regarding the underground railroad in Cincinnati, Ohio. The House should not serve as a substitute for reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,

but it should memorialize Beecher Stowe's contributions. Instead, it promotes the value of material things over Beecher Stowe's role in social progress—for example, the desk on which Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, not the content of the book.

What might Beecher Stowe think and feel if she took the tour through her house today?

Probably, she would be insulted to see her contributions to the abolition of slavery whittled down to material beeswax. Harriet Beecher Stowe fought against the very thing that the House represents: the elevation of property over intrinsic human value. Is there a worse way to honor the life of this woman? Who cares what Beecher Stowe owned or if she sat down in a rocking chair and knitted while her bird chirped away in a cage nearby? Give me some history. Quote her. Put her manuscripts on display. Explain what and who influenced this woman, what moved her, and who she moved to action. Why was she exceptional and how can we absorb her approach to the world and use it to challenge our own prejudices?

The Harriet Beecher Stowe House accurately reflects US cultural values. This fluff about a house's furniture, its gas lighting, and whether this portrait or that portrait is an original—it's aristocratic historical memory. Those who can afford to limit their memory of Harriet Beecher Stowe's life to her possessions are the representatives of the status quo, those people who were not the oppressed but the oppressors. A historic home like Stowe's is just an anthem, another salute to the capitalist elevation of property and material things over human dignity.





Who is this? You might think he's wearing a mask because he's on the run from the law, or because he lives near a nuclear reactor, or because he's about to use a bathroom in DKE, but he's not. He's actually former presidential hopeful Walter Mondale, and he writes for *Hermes*.

He Works on *Hermes*. **DO YOU?**

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